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## An Overview of Supervision in Libraries Today

The literature of library and information management is often of little assistance to the professional who supervises. Interactions with departments and services of the parent organization, such as conforming to policies on personnel, purchasing or accounting, are seldom clarified. Some of the literature reports management theories which were developed for business organizations. However, these theories may not be applicable to libraries, since libraries do not have the same types or levels of personnel, are not organized in the same way, and cannot amortize equipment or take advantage of other tax features which companies utilize. The authors of literature on management theory warn that, because of differences in the way companies are organized and operated, it can be dangerous to borrow concepts or ideas that worked in one company and apply them to another. In fact, even the designations "top management," "middle management" and "supervisory management" signify different concepts in different companies and libraries.<sup>1</sup>

The area of supervisory management requires particular caution. In any organization, it is at this level that policies are implemented. This paper uses the rather broad definition of supervision as the face-to-face interaction of a library professional, who has administrative responsibility, with another employee, usually a subordinate. This applies at all levels of management with all types of employees: to the director interacting with assistant directors, to the department head with his or her professionals, or to the professional with clerical employees.

Both management literature and the library literature are written as if management were pure, pristine, and conducted in a leisurely manner.

One author recently discussed the "managerial mystique," claiming that management is mathematical in rationale, steeped in business jargon, male in orientation, and predicated on assumptions about power relationships.<sup>2</sup> The literature acknowledges little of the rush, conflict or indecision of the actual job situation. One branch librarian in a public library recently told me that he had difficulty remembering theory X or Y when two employees were coming to blows. In libraries, as in industry, decisions are not always logical, clear-cut and accepted by all concerned.

Why is there concern about supervision? The answer is economics. Fry and White stated that in 1973, salaries accounted for 59 percent of academic libraries' budgets, 68 percent of public libraries' budgets, and 60-65 percent of special libraries' budgets.<sup>3</sup> The University of Illinois's 1977 annual survey of public libraries indicated that 67 percent of budgeted funds were for salaries.<sup>4</sup>

The topic of supervision is a particularly sensitive one for those in the library and information field. The supervisor may feel that he or she is an example of the Peter Principle, viz., that people rise in an organization to their maximum level of incompetence. In supervision, it is more likely that Murphy's Law operates: anything that can go wrong will. Studies indicate that librarians have poor leadership qualities, exhibit little interest in administration, and are poor managers.<sup>5</sup> In a session on middle management at ALA's 1978 conference in Chicago, the first question from the floor was, "Why are librarians such poor managers and supervisors?" It has only been in recent years that "bad news" stories have begun to appear,<sup>6</sup> but today almost every issue of *Library Journal* contains at least one news story about a library's administrative problems.<sup>7</sup>

However, despite obvious major differences between industrial and library management, there are similarities:

1. In both the company and the library, supervisors must learn to supervise. This skill is not intuitive, but can be developed through study, observation and practice.
2. Both companies and libraries are haunted by the phantom of the "happy employee." For years sociologists and psychologists have said that people must enjoy their jobs. Now some writers are providing contrary views.<sup>8</sup>
3. Both companies and libraries use different styles of supervisory management for different work settings and types of employees. Corporations use different techniques and styles for employees in production, research and sales; for professional and nonprofessional employees; and for various combinations of classifications. In libraries there are professional, nonprofessional, student, public service, library faculty,

processing, and branch library employees, all of which are treated in a slightly different manner.

4. Both companies and libraries have employees who are considered to be problems for one reason or another. These "problem employees" may be found at all levels of the organization.

This paper outlines some of the components of library supervisory management today. In 1977 I prepared a review on the special librarian as a supervisor and middle manager.<sup>9</sup> The present paper will touch a few of the same points, but will include new material, partly based on a survey of recent library school graduates.

### **THE LIBRARY ENVIRONMENT**

In order to gain some perspective on the milieu in which supervisory management takes place, one must look at the library environment. In this regard, Echelman cites factors such as the "structure, personnel, products, policies, plans, and the political interaction of people and departments" of the parent organization.<sup>10</sup> Librarians are classified as supervisors or middle managers according to the academic, administrative or public civil service classifications. Library faculty members may be expected to meet the same requirements for research and publication that teaching faculty members are.

The review on the special librarian as supervisor includes detailed descriptions of academic, public, institutional, government, special, and other library environments.<sup>11</sup> Academic libraries have provosts, boards of trustees and influential alumni. Their library committees for the system and for the individual branch libraries are composed of faculty. These tax-supported libraries are also governed by the state legislature and sometimes by a board of regents or commission on higher education. In addition to reporting to a local official, public libraries usually have boards of trustees which represent the citizens. Some public libraries also receive funds from state legislatures.

There are also library/information services for state and federal agencies and for companies and corporations. There are libraries in hospitals, museums, prisons and nursing homes, and library/media centers in the schools. A new type of library is the administrative headquarters of networks or consortia. Each of these has its own separate "environment."

### **INTERACTIONS OF LIBRARY PERSONNEL**

In the library environment, interactions between library personnel take place on many different levels. Often one thinks of the above-mentioned groups interacting with the library director or assistant director,

but generally interactions originate at lower levels in the organization. For example, the interlibrary loan librarian at the public library may be asked by a local company representative to use the library teletype, the only one in the community. An influential alumnus may request the branch librarian to provide him or her with a receipt for books donated to the library for tax credit purposes. The irate citizen who objects to materials in the collection usually approaches the circulation supervisor first. These examples indicate the need for guidelines, particularly written guidelines, that will enable supervisors to cope with situations as they arise.

There are positive interactions to consider as well. Circulation supervisors are often requested to attend a library board meeting when circulation is to be discussed. Supervisors may give presentations at budget reviews and other key meetings. The branch heads perform a great many liaison activities, with the community in a public library or with the subject departments in a university.

Whether they are in public, government agency, academic or company situations, library managers have similar relationships with other departments in the parent organization which affect their decisions. For example, the parent organization may insist that all purchasing be processed by the central purchasing department rather than permit the library acquisitions supervisor to send orders directly to the vendors. This sometimes causes delays without any appreciable financial benefits since some types of book and subscription orders allow very little discount. Many tax-supported agencies must solicit bids for orders; this sometimes impedes the development of continuing services with vendors. Other complications arise when the central purchasing department specifies the manufacturers from which equipment such as typewriters or photocopiers may be purchased.

Other departments in the parent organization with which library supervisory personnel must interact include personnel departments, central business offices, computer service centers, subject departments, and building and maintenance services. The central business office is also usually involved in issuing paychecks and budgeting for expenditures, and large library systems often have a staff accountant to deal with the central business office. Library supervisors must also interact with the central computer service, e.g., the systems librarian sometimes must consult with the computer center on selection of software programs, and library management's needs for data must be scheduled at the computer center. Even the building and maintenance service sometimes affects decisions of library managers. Staff changes and clientele services may be delayed until custodial staff move furniture or electri-



cians install equipment. Smoking or eating may be prohibited in some areas by building regulations.

An important issue in supervisory management is the amounts of time which should be devoted to supervision and to serving the clientele. This is an especially difficult problem in libraries which are open long hours, as the administration may not be able to provide professional assistance during the entire time that the public service areas are open. Supervisors of branch or departmental libraries often do not have sufficient professional help to provide reference service at all hours, which is particularly unfortunate in a specialized subject department. However, supervisors must be available between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., the standard workday of many organizations.

Some administrators solve these dilemmas by having the department head assume all supervision, freeing other professionals to interact with clientele. Another solution is for the department head to assign one professional to supervise clerks. Such responsibilities may also be rotated in order to give all the professionals supervisory experience.

There are sometimes auxiliary or even competing library and information services on the same property, or funded by the same organization. University and public libraries are involved with research institutes, independent laboratories, instructional centers, or computer-based instruction centers, all of which may employ parent organization personnel or draw extensively on the collections.

The new free-lance service, offered on a fee basis, often utilizes the collections of nearby university or public libraries.<sup>12</sup> These services include on-line computer searches, document delivery, consultation, and others which parallel or supplement standard library services.

The network or consortium authority is now beginning to influence the work of supervisory managers in its member libraries. The inter-library loan supervisor who depended on personal contacts in neighboring libraries to obtain fast service must now conform to formulas established by the consortium. The chief cataloger has the original cataloging of his department scrutinized by all members of the on-line computer cataloging network.<sup>13</sup> All administrators are involved in motivating employees to adapt to innovations associated with joining a network or consortium.<sup>14</sup>

## **MANAGEMENT OF LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION SERVICES**

The primary reason that interest in library management has been gathering momentum in recent years is due to the problems of providing services to all types of clientele in the face of increased inflation and reduced budgets. The emphasis on the functional form of organization has

been spurred by Association of Research Libraries studies and the development of its Management Review and Analysis Program.<sup>15</sup>

Large, multicampus systems, such as those in Indiana, California and New York, must adapt to: (1) the prevailing wages in each community; (2) the number and abilities of people available to fill the positions; (3) the number of hours the library is open, which is based on the commuting patterns of students, faculty and employees; (4) the types of courses taught; and (5) the amount and types of research conducted. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of subject fields and the cost of maintaining separate facilities, there has been a trend away from multibranch, specialized or departmental systems in universities. In the public library, costs are halting the trend toward specialized branches for subject and clientele.

Libraries are complex organizations, and the larger the library, the greater its complexity. As part of the trend toward scientific management and the use of on-line computer systems, new professional positions — which are sometimes not held by professional librarians — have arisen. These include accountants, personnel people, systems analysts and subject specialists who work with collection development or on-line searches. Many librarians believe the only “true” librarian is one with background in the humanities or social sciences; they even exclude those trained in life sciences, physical sciences and mathematics. These conflicting definitions of “professional” may interfere with daily working relationships.

### **LIMITATIONS ON LIBRARY MANAGEMENT**

Many factors can adversely affect the supervisor's authority. Sometimes library employees are assigned responsibilities without the authority to take appropriate action. For example, the branch head may have several levels of the hierarchy to which he or she must report:

An academic library may have many physically separate service points, but little decentralization, if the branch librarians are not delegated authority to undertake meaningful independent actions. . . . Scientific management . . . demands that the degree of decentralization . . . be decided on the basis of . . . such factors as the need for uniform policies, the relative economics of library size and location, the availability of personnel with managerial ability or potential, and the effectiveness of the control techniques available to the delegating manager.<sup>16</sup>

As mentioned above, the library's membership in networks and consortia may also limit the decisions of the individual supervisor; a recent article notes some of the tension networks can create for the partici-

pating libraries.<sup>17</sup> Referring to the business management literature, Petit states that the industrial supervisor must operate in a highly intradependent organization and interact with many different individuals who, directly or indirectly, affect his or her job. The supervisor must make five major accommodations:

1. ideological (the supervisor is no longer "boss");
2. engineering (in industry, the engineering department tells the foreman what products to make and how to make them);
3. personnel (staff departments have taken over functions such as hiring, placement, training, transferring, awarding merit increases, and firing);
4. organization-systems (other staff members establish procedures and techniques such as planning, operations research, finance and accounting); and
5. labor-relations (the supervisor must contend with a union steward who represents his subordinates).<sup>18</sup>

There are many parallels in the library. The personnel function seems to be changing most rapidly. Ruth Jackson reports that prior to 1970, academic libraries lagged in the areas of job analysis, job evaluation and personnel testing.<sup>19</sup> The complexities of hiring in accordance with equal opportunity strictures and the emphasis on staff development will possibly bring even greater attention to this area. In the organization-systems accommodation, as the operations become more mechanized, the services are adapted to the system. For example, use of OCLC tapes to produce accessions lists for the branch libraries may limit the amount and kinds of individualized material that can be included in these lists. A problem inherent in the shift from the hierarchical organization in the library is that professionals must consider whether they should give priority to obeying the administrators or to fulfilling responsibility (i.e., providing service to clientele).<sup>20</sup>

Another pervasive problem is enforcing directives. Rules state that students cannot work unless they have an employment form on file; however, in emergencies supervisors may hire a temporary substitute just to keep a branch open. During the winter storms of 1978, Purdue University issued directives that employees who did not report for work had to take vacation time or other accrued leave in order to be paid; however, many supervisors unofficially permitted employees to make up the time.

The literature concerning the leadership qualities of librarians and information specialists is extremely negative. Binder has studied the supervisory behavior of librarians in academic libraries and found that

there was little difference between professional and nonprofessional employees' abilities for and attitudes toward supervision.<sup>21</sup> In a study of middle managers in medium-sized public libraries, Gamaluddin found that professionals were unwilling to make decisions even when they were given the opportunity to do so.<sup>22</sup>

Kay's analysis of industrial managers closely parallels the situation for middle managers in libraries and information services. Many persons who entered middle management in the 1960s now find they are boxed in by their jobs; they are too specialized for lateral transfer or they lack the varied work experiences and formal education required for advancement. They suffer from job insecurity, lack of authority, career inflexibility, and threat of obsolescence. As with supervisors, increased interest in scientific management only creates more tensions. Although controls and systems provide middle managers with information on which to base decisions, these same controls have the effect of increasing the visibility of all successes and failures and thus may increase pressures to perform better.<sup>23</sup>

There has been much discussion about faculty status for academic librarians but little substantive material on how the librarian is to devote adequate time to publication and research as well as perform administrative responsibilities. When a teaching faculty member takes a sabbatical, the department does not offer his or her courses in the interim. If a library faculty member takes a sabbatical, however, someone must assume those responsibilities during that period.<sup>24</sup> Another implication of faculty status is that the library faculty forms a "collegial body" and should select its own head, who may not necessarily be the library director.<sup>25</sup> Bailey points out questions that arise when a collegial organization is superimposed over a library organization.<sup>26</sup>

### **PROBLEMS FACING THE LIBRARY SUPERVISOR**

In the following sections some items concerning the direct supervision of employees are considered: the composition of the work force, the question of motivation and staff development, and some implications of collective bargaining and equal opportunity for employment.

#### *Nonprofessional Personnel*

The advent of technical assistants and aides in libraries has raised the 2-fold problem of "career ladders": (1) years of experience substitute for a master's degree in library science in the case of the nonprofessional,<sup>27</sup> and (2) auxiliary employees, such as nonsupervisory professionals and research systems and personnel staff, have pay scales and status equated with those of library supervisors.

In some organizations, flexible scheduling or flex-time is used.<sup>28</sup>



This takes two principal forms: (1) staff may work any hours they choose for a total of thirty-five to forty hours per week, or (2) they may work ten hours per day, four days per week with three days off. An inherent problem with this innovation is ensuring that sufficient personnel to handle the daily work load are present. Schemes such as this have arisen in order to staff computer operations or attract personnel who would normally be unable to work a standard day due to family commitments, class schedules or other personal reasons. Although public service units have always had some scheduling flexibility due to the long hours they are open, these schemes provide even greater flexibility.

Many areas of the country are experiencing a severe shortage of clerical and secretarial people. Reasons for this are varied: women are seeking jobs in other fields, and companies are giving professional assignments to women in order to fulfill affirmative action programs; also, universities with declining enrollments no longer have a steady supply of student spouses to work in offices and libraries. As a result, many clerical jobs are being designed to allow for the constant turnover in personnel, and supervisors are hiring people with borderline qualifications. With the increasing emphasis on hiring permanent employees from the local community, people with physical disabilities, and retaining employees with alcohol- or drug-related problems, many job descriptions and assignments must be reevaluated and revised.

Family considerations often restrict people to a specific geographical area. The question of hiring people who hold master's degrees in library science as clerical staff is one of interest to many libraries.<sup>29</sup> The supervisor of such individuals is responsible for providing them with meaningful work without exploiting their advanced skills at a low salary. Also, requiring a degree from an ALA-accredited institution for professional staff bars from library employment available persons with degrees in media science or other related fields.

Student and other part-time employees are utilized in many types of libraries. They are often eligible for minimum wage. The employment of both full- and part-time employees is sometimes complicated when salaries are subsidized by nonlibrary funds, such as grants, work-study programs or CETA. If these funds expire, affected employees must be transferred to the library payroll or the services they performed must be eliminated.

### *Occupational Safety and Health*

Another outside force affecting personnel is the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act.<sup>30</sup> Although universities are exempt from this federal law, some states have similar laws which apply to state agencies. Under current OSHA legislation, an employee dissatisfied with

action taken on any complaint can report the incident to the state agency.

### *Motivation and Staff Development*

Much is written on the supervisor's responsibility to motivate, but little on proven methods of accomplishing it. The idea of participative management in libraries has attracted a great deal of attention.<sup>31</sup> Under this method, all staff members concerned discuss a problem and suggest possible solutions. There is some disagreement whether the group should actually make the decision or simply provide input to the supervisor who then makes the decision. Tarr suggests that decisions should be reached through committees.<sup>32</sup> Mason has presented some ideas in opposition and warns that much time can be expended on "making employees happy" without improving services to users.<sup>33</sup>

Another area of supervisory management on which little information has appeared is the supervisor's responsibility for career development of subordinates. A study by Edwards found that supervisors viewed the first year or two of a librarian's career as a closely supervised training period.<sup>34</sup> Others felt that the beginning librarian should be able to assume specific responsibilities on the "first day" of employment.<sup>35</sup> The Office for Library Personnel Resources of ALA currently has a project entitled "Minimum Qualifications for Librarians." However, the extent of the supervisor's responsibility for the employee's failure to perform acceptably is not clear.

### *Collective Bargaining*

It is at the supervisory level that collective bargaining has the most impact. Union contracts are negotiated with an organization's top management. Supervisors are then responsible for the performance of daily work within the constraints of the contract. Depending on contract provisions, decisions of hiring, training, promotion, salary schedules and terminations may be removed from the domain of the immediate supervisor, thus reducing his or her authority. Also, questions concerning changes, vacation assignments and filling vacancies may have to be negotiated with the union steward rather than directly with employees.

### *Equal Employment Opportunity*

It is only recently that the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) guidelines have been applied to universities and other groups which receive grant money or other federal funds. It is the library administration's responsibility to see that supervisory management personnel have the information they need to conform to the regulations, such as those concerning interviewing and hiring procedures.

## WHAT SUPERVISORS DO

Since supervisory management positions in libraries require a complex mixture of subject expertise, supervisory responsibilities and professional activities, there can be no simple description of what supervisors do. In previous studies this author looked at middle managers in academic and public libraries.<sup>36</sup> A new study examines supervisors and middle managers in corporation libraries.<sup>37</sup> In 1970, the Illinois State Library sponsored a comprehensive study entitled "A Task Analysis of Library Jobs in the State of Illinois";<sup>38</sup> other studies on this subject include those conducted by Canelas on academic libraries,<sup>39</sup> Ricking on public libraries,<sup>40</sup> and Wiese on school library media systems.<sup>41</sup>

I have investigated the extent to which people employed for two or four years would reach consensus regarding fourteen specific responsibilities. Two hundred questionnaires were sent to graduates of the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science for the years 1974-76; 104 usable replies were received. Of the respondents, 55 percent were employed in academic libraries, 22 percent in public libraries, 8 percent in schools, and 17 percent in other types of libraries. These respondents represent a higher proportion of academic librarians and lower proportion of public and school librarians than was reported in the placement statistics for 1974-76.<sup>42</sup>

Shera said library research can be described as "breaking down open doors."<sup>43</sup> Much of the following material falls in this category. Involvement in collective bargaining has led some library administrations to prepare guidelines distinguishing the duties of professional and clerical supervisors. For example, a Purdue University administrative memorandum states that hiring, dismissing, evaluating, disciplining, and administering wages must be handled by a professional supervisor, while the clerical supervisor is responsible for directing the activities of a work group or unit, may participate in employee evaluation, and may hire students for the work unit.

The literature has accorded little attention to the difference in supervisory techniques according to type of work performed and number and type of employees. The appropriate method of supervision depends on such factors as: (1) whether departmental people have face-to-face contact with clientele, (2) number of hours the unit is open, (3) number and classification of employees in the unit, (4) educational background of employees, and (5) whether it is a multibranch system and/or multilocation system. For instance, changing the hours of operation from forty to ninety-three per week may require greater reliance on written procedures, policies and regulations. Delegation of tasks increases and each person must know his or her exact responsibilities. Evaluation becomes

a problem because the supervisor is not always present; he or she must observe job performance without seeming to spy or making informants of fellow employees.

In response to the author's survey, 98 percent of the respondents agreed that a supervisor evaluates the performance of employees, and 95 percent that the supervisor oversees the training of employees (see Table 1). Ninety-four percent agreed that supervisors recommend employees for discharge, and 91 percent indicated that they were responsible for overseeing work scheduling and recommending employees for promotion. Ninety percent agreed that supervisors must have detailed knowledge of the work performed in the unit, oversee the writing of job descriptions, and discipline employees.

TABLE 1. ATTITUDES OF LIBRARY SCHOOL GRADUATES TOWARD  
SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES

<i>Responsibilities of Supervisors</i>	<i>Percentage in Agreement</i>
Evaluate employee performance	98.1
Oversee employee training	95.2
Recommend employee discharge	94.2
Oversee work scheduling	91.3
Recommend employee promotions	91.3
Have detailed knowledge of work performed in unit	90.4
Oversee writing of job descriptions of subordinates	90.4
Discipline employees	90.4
Decide how work should be performed in conjunction with employees	87.5
Have knowledge of conducting interviews to fill vacancies	87.4
Provide procedures manual	82.7
Have knowledge of grievance-handling	78.8
Have knowledge of EEO guidelines	74.0
Have knowledge of OSHA regulations	62.5

It is interesting to note that only 87 percent of the respondents felt that a supervisor should know how to conduct an interview to fill a vacancy. Since employee selection and evaluation are perhaps a supervisor's most important tasks, it seems that this should have been ranked higher. However, most employees are perhaps selected by department heads and assistant directors rather than by supervisors. Only 82 percent of the respondents believed supervisors should provide procedure manuals with detailed instructions on how to perform tasks; in industrial settings, instructing employees is one of the most frequently performed supervisory tasks.<sup>44</sup> That only 78 percent of the respondents recognized



the handling of grievances as a supervisory responsibility is probably due to the fact that this is a local responsibility primarily involving libraries engaged in collective bargaining or those whose employees belong to unions.

Although ALA and other professional groups have been quite active in dispensing information about equal opportunity in employment, only 74 percent of the respondents viewed this knowledge as a responsibility of the supervisor. It is probably in the area of interviewing, selection, promotion, transfer and discharge — all areas of concern to supervisors — that most EEO violations occur.

The least amount of agreement among respondents concerned the area of occupational health and safety regulations. In interviewing middle managers and administrators two years ago, I found little concern about this topic. Safety receives a great deal of attention in the industrial setting. Most texts on supervision contain at least one chapter on the safety responsibilities of the industrial supervisor, and a recent thesis lists seventy-four such responsibilities.<sup>45</sup> Many unions are adding health and environmental specialists to their staffs to assist in evaluating working conditions. Although the library may not itself be governed by these or similar regulations, branch libraries located in departmental buildings where research is conducted may be affected. The regulations on providing access for the handicapped to all buildings require new layouts and designs for libraries. Most libraries housed in older buildings may discover potential safety hazards in flammable building materials, inaccessible nooks and crannies, improperly anchored shelving, overcrowded shelves, etc. Purely from the standpoint of human relations, library administrators should be concerned about safety precautions.

## CONCLUSION

This overview of supervisory management has surveyed the library environment, the management "style" of the library, the demands for professionalism, and concern for employees. The trend is toward increased emphasis on personnel practices, especially those involving equal opportunity for employment, collective bargaining, occupational safety and health, and affirmative action.

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